

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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NEWS BRIEFS FROM THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Public Hearing on Kangaroo Ban. The comment period has been reopened and a public hearing will be held September 16 on the proposal to lift the ban on commercial imports of three kangaroo species and products made from them. The hearing will begin at 9 a.m. in Room 8068, Main Interior Building, 18th and C Streets, N.W. Washington, D.C. Comments will be accepted through October 1.

The Fish and Wildlife Service proposed lifting the ban in the June 16, 1980, Federal Register after a review of recent information indicated that closely monitored commercial trade would not be detrimental. The review also indicated the kangaroos were more numerous than previously thought and concluded that the Australian Government had instituted sound management programs to protect the kangaroos from overexploitation.

The ban on commercial trade was imposed in December 1974 when the red, eastern gray, and western gray kangaroos were listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. The current proposal would continue listing of the animals as threatened so that the ban could be reimposed quickly if drought, disease, overharvesting, or other problems adversely affect their population levels.

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Manatee Protection Areas Proposed. Three manatee protection areas in the Kings Bay area of Florida's Crystal River have been proposed by the Service in the August 12, 1980, Federal Register.

Representing roughly 10 acres of underwater habitat, the proposal would restrict water-related activities, such as boating and swimming, between November 15 and March 31 of each year in the vicinity of several warmwater springs where the endangered manatees congregate during winter.

Between 80 and 100 manatees -- nearly one-tenth of the species' estimated total population -- are thought to winter in Kings Bay. The slow-moving manatees are frequently injured in mishaps with boat traffic and in flood control gates. Many manatees bear scars from past encounters with boat propellers.

The Service is accepting public comment on the proposed designations through September 11, 1980. Comments should be sent to the Area Manager, Jacksonville Area Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 15 North Laura Street, Jacksonville, Florida 32202.

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Wildlife Import/Export Licenses Required. Federal law enforcement officials expect to find it easier to curb the massive illegal trade in wildlife with the help of new regulations that require all commercial wildlife importers and exporters to be licensed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Applications for the \$50 license must be filed by December 31, 1980.

The licensing requirement puts into effect a provision of the Endangered Species Act that makes it unlawful "for any person to engage in business as an importer or exporter of fish and wildlife ... without first having obtained permission from the Secretary (of the Interior)." This provision applies to all fish and wildlife, not just those that are officially listed as endangered or threatened.

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"Along with existing civil and criminal penalties, the potential loss of a business license will be an added deterrent to would-be violators of wildlife laws," said Clark R. Bavin, chief of the Interior Department agency's Division of Law Enforcement. "A person whose livelihood depends on this license will think twice before embarking on criminal activities that may lead to its revocation.

"Much of the estimated \$50 to \$100 million illegal wildlife trade is conducted by well organized, large-scale operators who move the illegal fish or wildlife into or out of the country with falsified documents," Bavin said. "Smuggling also accounts for a substantial amount of the illegal traffic in furs, skins, feathers, shells, oil, and meat of much of the world's wildlife."

The licensing requirement also will make it easier to monitor trade in particular species, providing an early warning signal that a species is being excessively exploited. Those who must apply for the license include retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers of furs, leather products, jewelry, rugs, and curios, as well as pet dealers, taxidermists, and laboratory and research suppliers. Licenses will also be required for distributors, suppliers, and freight forwarders so that the wildlife can be accounted for throughout its journey. In addition to being licensed, persons who import or export species protected by specific laws also must obtain the appropriate Federal and State permits.

The new rules were published in the August 25, 1980, Federal Register.

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Action Plan on Striped Bass Available. An action plan for a 3-year emergency study on the decline of Atlantic Coast striped bass populations has been completed and is available to the public. The plan, prepared by representatives from the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service, the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State/Federal Management Program, provides an overall strategy for research on the numbers and distribution of striped bass, the causes of the fish's decline, and the economic importance of the striped bass fishery.

Copies are available from the Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1 Gateway Center, Newton Corner, Massachusetts 02158, and from the Regional Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, 14 Elm Street, Federal Building, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930.

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Publication Available

"The Fish Car Era." In the days before superhighways and jet-age travel when railroads were the only link between the isolated hamlets and cross-roads of post-Civil War America, large, lumbering behemoths known as "fish cars" criss-crossed the country delivering the Federal Government's fish. These converted rail cars carried much of the output of the early Federal fish hatchery system.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken a nostalgic look back at this colorful chapter from its past in a new publication entitled, "The Fish Car Era." Copies are available free from the Publications Unit, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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